

The following is from Yucca Mountain - Sacred Site

http://www.sacredland.org/endangered_sites_pages/yucca_mountain.html

- In the late 1970s government scientists began to study Yucca Mountain as a possible repository for nuclear waste, and since 1987 it has been the only site considered for 77,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste. 98% of all the radioactive waste generated by U.S. nuclear reactors may soon be headed for the mountain. There is already more nuclear waste than the repository can hold, unless the 77,000 ton limit is raised. Though the facility will not open until 2010 at the earliest, reactor waste now sitting in pools of water around the country will fill Yucca Mountain's tunnels and leave room for less than one third of the government's nuclear defense waste, leaving 15,000 canisters of radioactive waste (7,500 metric tons) with no place to go. Commercial nuclear power plants produce 2,000 tons of high level waste per year, and by the time Yucca Mountain is full in 2035, there will be 42,000 tons of newly generated civilian waste at reactors around the country. The Yucca Mountain repository promises to be much bigger than advertised. The estimated cost of construction and maintenance of the facility for the first 100 years of operation is \$58 billion. The waste is lethal for 10,000 years and dangerous for 250,000 years.
- For years, there has been continuous wrangling over legislation to authorize site approval and waste transport to Yucca Mountain, and Congressional votes have been very close. In February 2002, the Bush Administration formally recommended construction of the waste dump. As is permitted in the federal law governing the location of America's nuclear waste repository, Nevada's governor vetoed the Bush recommendation, but was overridden by the House of Representatives (306-117) and Senate (60-39). President Bush signed the bill making Yucca Mountain the nation's central repository for nuclear waste on July 23, 2002. Nevada's Republican Governor Kenny Guinn and Attorney General Brian Sandoval have sued Bush and the federal government to block the nuclear dump plan. So far, strong opposition by politicians and citizens has delayed implementation and the projected start date for the waste repository is uncertain.
- Current Department of Energy plans call for the highly radioactive nuclear waste to be encased in steel containers and buried deep in the mountain. Since the canisters will last for 1,000 years at most, the dryness of the mountain will have to guarantee against leakage and migration — an idea that environmentalists and many scientists say is a flawed and dangerous assumption. Surface water percolates into the mountain, and will carry radioactive particles into the water table and render it toxic. This water table currently supplies water to local communities and farming regions which produce milk and other food products for the entire country. In March 2005, Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman confirmed the existence of internal e-mails that refer to falsified data on how quickly water flows through the Yucca Mountain. Robert Hager, attorney for the Western Shoshone, argues that the Yucca site would have been disqualified years ago if the true nature of the subterranean water flow was known. With several local fault lines and a volcano nearby, earthquakes make it likely that the mountain will fracture the repository and send even more water to the waste. There are also grave concerns about the safety of transporting nuclear waste over long distances through several U.S. states, particularly in an era of terrorist threats. The Shoshone, who have been exposed to many years of nuclear weapons testing, suffer from high rates of cancer, leukemia, and other diseases — revealing the community health risk that comes from exposure to radiation.
- Beyond all the safety issues lies the fact that the Shoshone should be able to determine what goes on at the mountain due to treaty rights and their historical and spiritual ties to the area. Government work has already disturbed burial remains and denied Native Americans access to the rock prayer rings. The Yucca Mountain controversy is rarely acknowledged as one that, at its heart, is about native sovereignty and the need to care for the land in a way that is spiritually responsible and environmentally sound. Even if the dump at Yucca Mountain is defeated, Shoshone and other native peoples' homelands are constantly being considered for storing dangerous toxic waste. Opponents of the nuclear dump at Yucca Mountain worry that with George W. Bush's approval of the site on the recommendation of former Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, an outspoken supporter of the plan, there will be increased support for nuclear power and increased pressure to approve and build the dump, since the DOE is more than a decade behind schedule in terms of receiving and storing waste from power plants. Already, there are over 40,000 metric tons of nuclear waste stored in pools or casks in 39 states. The Associated Press recently published a "Where is the waste now?" map. In July 2003, the House appropriations committee proposed increasing the budget for the Yucca Mountain Project by 67%, an

enormous spending increase that suggests a renewed enthusiasm for nuclear energy. However, in November 2005, the Senate and House revealed a possible new direction in energy policy: led by Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM) and Rep. David Hobson (R-OH), they voted to cut \$200 million from the budget for the Yucca Mountain project, and instead appropriated \$130 million of the funds for research on technologies that would reprocess nuclear waste. Reprocessing would recycle used plutonium into fresh fuel and reduce, but not eliminate, the amount of waste. Several scientific studies have called this option expensive and dangerous, due to the increased chance of proliferating materials that could be used in nuclear weapons.

- The Nuclear Regulatory Commission must still assess the Department of Energy's design and license application and decide whether to license the waste repository and approve transporting 77,000 tons of nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain. Citizens in other states are finally beginning to understand that Yucca Mountain could be a very bad idea for the entire country, and are leery of having the waste shipped through their communities on rails and highways. Many believe that the process has essentially been rigged from the start, and that the decision was ultimately made not based on sound science but on who was the weakest guy in the room: Nevada has only four electoral votes. Some observers also say that the siting of the nuclear waste repository is an example of environmental racism, and that Native Americans and other peoples of color have been subjected to a disproportionately large number of health and environmental risks in their communities. The Western Shoshone National Council continues to fight the project, filing a lawsuit in March 2005 in Las Vegas federal district court, which claims that the Yucca Mountain Development Act is unconstitutional and that the federal government does not own the land.

- For detailed information on Western Shoshone stewardship over this land please go to:
- http://www.sacredland.org/endangered_sites_pages/yucca_mountain.html